

# TEACHING TOO LATE, LEARNING TOO EARLY - 1940

Lecture given to faculty at Dartmouth College  
Chapter 8 from, I AM AN IMPURE THINKER, Argo  
Press  
Feringer notes  
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1. The goal of the author is to make three points: 1) The time has come to build a science of timing, of which teaching and learning are its principle elements. 2) Society will be (is) doomed without the timing of teaching - we suffer every day from "brain erosion." 3) Every individual must be trained in the importance of timing in all of his experiences - the greatest sin of which is being either too early or too late.

[RF - ERH assumes that learning means understanding some experience, taking it into one's deepest values and being willing and capable of applying that learning in the right situation. `Applying' means acting in an efficacious way, at the right time. The opposite definition would be that learning is achieved by scheduling and teaching by the clock. This is artificial and ineffective, for the most part. One can schedule rote exercises, but not understanding.]

2. A convincing anecdote makes a case for the importance of timing in teaching. A town has prevented its own destruction during the Peasants War in Germany. It anticipated the possibility of a social breakdown from corruption in the Catholic church 40 years before the Reformation. Town leaders entered into a self education program promoting continued social peace between diverse religious groups. After the inception of the Reformation (1525 A.D.), marauding bands of religious zealots roamed the countryside, destroying towns in their path. **THE RESULT OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM WAS THAT THE TOWN WAS ONE OF THE FEW THAT SAVED ITSELF, BECAUSE IT WAS UNITED IN ITS BELIEF IN RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE. IT WAS CAPABLE OF DEFENDING ITSELF AGAINST THESE BANDS.** An important fact of this successful educational program was that it broke monastic rules of that time.

3. Academe faces a crisis today. Curricula is peripherally relevant to today's needs, and teaching depends mainly on rote memorization. The social meaning of studies is largely ignored. **THIS IS DISASTROUS IN THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES.**

Objectivity is its god. It would treat all realities as things external to the mind, things in which we as thinkers have no roots, which may accordingly be touched, weighed, measured, and manipulated without reference to common destiny in which we and they are jointly bound. This

may do for physics. It will not do for human society. (p.93)

4. Social time is created by humans, not a given datum of nature, and lasts according to our making. It must be won and preserved by vigilance, "...otherwise our `present' is starved and distorted."

5. The past and the future are an "abyss" before and ahead of us. [RF - I believe he means, by this statement, that our penchant to think mainly in terms of the present consequences of our decision-making is destructive to both ourselves and to the community. Sacrificing discomfort in the `present' is always the price one pays for efficacious consequences in the future, for both ourselves and for our communities.]

6. When we speak, we are not only speaking and acting for ourselves, but we are also acting for others. One is a father or mother, a representative of a group, a son or daughter, a friend, a community member. **ALL THESE FORCES MUST BE BALANCED IN ADDRESSING IMPORTANT DECISIONS.**

7. We are able to become more than thinking animals; but in order to rise above this animal state into which we are born, we must communicate with others. Our ability to do this rests on our willingness to speak the truth and on the preservation of language.

8. As teachers we not only speak for ourselves, but also in the name of great causes through history. Socrates, Jesus, Newton, Abelard, Billy Mitchell sacrificed in order to speak the truth to improve the community. Today these lessons must be passed on. "Man's dignity is not in producing private opinions, but in timing public truth." (p.95)

9. Truth must come at the right moment, then the words take on full meaning. Otherwise, lacking such a timing element, they are abstract, not vital, as seeds fallen on barren earth. Truth becomes concrete (demonstrated) only at that moment. "For these reasons teaching involves the central problems of timing." (p.95)

10. Any decision, especially teaching, is preparation. Often it must be too late, because it occurs when we have seen the consequences of action; certainly this learning moment is a pregnant, but only for future use.

Just as often, teaching is too early because we must anticipate - it is "life in advance." Facts and anticipation are thus the paradox in timing. Facts are understood by analysis from past events. Anticipation conversely is entered only through love, faith, and hope. Concern for students, faith that the knowledge will prevent harm, move one forward, and hope that the right consequences will evolve.

11. Facts are past events, and are "poison" when their occurrence is not motivated by some problem that must be acted upon to create a future, i.e. when they are "...treated as an agenda."

12. Learning from others is borrowing (from others' experience), dead knowledge until brought to

life by our applying it (thereby bringing it back to life). Until then, knowledge is only words or formulas. And when we learn from others, we owe them gratitude for not making us re-invent that reality (completely). We lack enough time to learn what we need to learn as it is. And, of course when one does not learn about reality, one must re-invent it - like reinventing the wheel.

Thus, there must be a close relation between thinking and experience. To separate these is disastrous.

13. Gambling is the short-term substitute for faith. (p.99) ERH tells the story of a talented son of a missionary who left the studies of his ancestors for a profession in sociology and human relations. But, because modern social science utilizes the methods of the physics - incomplete for understanding our experience. What was his fate in these studies?

He often feels like going crazy, his big powers being wasted in separation between his sociological head that classifies everything like a botanist, and his living soul and body that must love and hate. ...He tries to analyze himself with modern psychology to find out what is wrong. OF course nothing is wrong with him; he is sane in a madhouse. But he is overcome by his academic environment that he denies himself his own rescue; he could jump to freedom by serving in a more than personal and more than "objective" cause ...(p.99)

The solution of course is to connect the thought with action in service to the community.

14. We tend to teach that no relation between learning and obligation and practice exists. Other examples in the text testify to this gap between learning and meaning and obligation and fulfillment (living).

We, in teaching, tend to destroy or punish those who live in, or for, the future. Individuals are usually somewhat self-denying, but groups are ever more greedy in their quest for power. [RF - or is group life the dark side of good individuals?] In groups we tend to be more self-serving. Such indulgence can only be rectified by following goals beyond ourselves.

15. How does one live beyond one's self-interest? By the realization that civilization, or our community and ourselves, or successors, will perish unless we act for goals beyond ourselves. By uniting both "production" and "reproduction," by connecting facts with meaning. As teachers we must refuse to bury students in an avalanche of facts.

By resting, and reflecting, a willingness to experiment and risk for a good cause we reach understanding of the subject matter. Separating fact from meaning creates two types: 1) the prodigy who knows numerous facts [RF - R.M. HUTCHINS coined the phrase, "knowing everything about nothing of importance."] And, 2) the playboy who can't take any learning seriously. Both types fail to contribute toward a future.

16. THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION IS SURVIVAL, TO PREPARE ONE TO OUTLIVE AND GROW THROUGH EACH STAGE OF LIFE, AND MOVE ON TO THE NEXT.

As academics, we tend to become stuck in the stage of disbelief. Our revolt against an overbearing religion has led us to this. But after several hundred years of this disbelief people are longing for some meaning in life, something more stable than ever-changing social norms.

Sans more fundamental beliefs, one degenerates into despair. One cannot be an atheist forever. It is useful only for transitions between stages when useful at all. Social survival is based on the reformation principle, to think anew about one's beliefs, to be re-deemed. [RF - By this he means to renew the way basic truths must become manifest.]

17. There are basically three life-stages for people; as children, as adults, and as elders. Each has an essential role. The elders reflect wisdom and prophecy - reminding others of the standards to be maintained. They are suited for this role because they no longer need to compete for power, or sex prowess, or status.

ALL EDUCATION SHOULD PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THESE THREE ROLES; THE ADULTS GOVERN AND FIGHT THE EVERYDAY BATTLES, AND THE CHILDREN MUST ACCEPT THE OBLIGATION TO BECOME PREPARED FOR FUTURE ROLES. The chief goal of all education is to aim toward preparing elders, regardless of the fact that only a few are chosen.

18. Colleges cannot degenerate into trade schools for people to maintain "systems" (maintaining institutions like medicine, manufacturing, education, etc.)

Students must be taught to have an expectancy of a better society, to be taught facts in the context of meaning and use them to that end.

19. The Enlightenment of 1750, with science as a dominant ideal, persists today and creates no social expectancy. No motive to improve society, or for "...a great miraculous, surprising future." Expectancy carries one beyond mere doubt, beyond burnout and despair in middle age.

Education must therefore give promise to have a better life as a fruit of knowledge. Life is more desirable than any abstraction, any ideal, any separation of mind from body (i.e. the separation declared by Descartes).

20. Our education today fails to produce genuine elders. The growth and anticipation of students is stunted; as a consequence it fails now in preparing them to see through quacks and tyrants, whatever their form.

Quackery and tyranny is more often than not subtle and refined in its ability to convince people to give up their power. The only antidote to such a condition is the elder, who warns and prophesies. Every student cannot become an elder, of course, but he/she can learn to identify one, and be instilled with the courage to identify wisdom and to speak out the truth.

The antidote to facts is "fienda." The cultural lag represented by teaching, through which society has to assimilate each newcomer, can be balanced by crediting out students with being

ancestors of as many generations to come as have gone before. When we look at teaching from the end of man, from the regeneration of the universal order, we shall treat the student as the founder of centuries. (p.108)

21. What present problems must students be taught to solve? We must teach them what the ultimate end should be, and what a decent society might be as a standard. Teaching students their obligation to speak out as determined by that end. **THE END DETERMINES THE BEGINNING**, in the present. Facts come to life when used to renew society.

We must teach about the dreams of our ancestors, and what is yet unfinished. We must revivify the commonplace, such as that the lack of justice leads to gangsterism. **THIS TAKES GREAT EFFORT AND DEDICATION, AND OFTEN RISK.**

22. Three levels of reality must be taught students so that they properly exercise their powers: 1) about "things," over which we humans are superior; about the ethics of manipulation of things in nature, in other words, about science, its limits and its purpose. 2) About that which is our equal, our fellow humans, with whom we must learn to respect and cooperate in order to survive. Achieving meaningful agreement requires an exercise of power "with," rather than power "over." 3) We must learn how to deal with those things which have power over us, (natural catastrophes, famine, earthquakes). Perhaps most of all, we must teach the power to instill in ourselves courage and the will to act appropriately. Finally teaching that as we are mortal, and to expect death as a part of nature, but also the difficulty in surviving the change in stages of maturing. **OUR PRESENT CURRICULUM REPRESENTS ONLY THE FIRST OF THESE THREE.**

23. Passage from one stage in life to another is a wrenching transformation, a spiritual phenomenon. Transformation is empowered by two forces, expectation and a sense of time and timing. How, for instance, do we transform and give hope and power to the down-trodden, so that they will not revolt? One needs to educate to such assimilation.

Transformation is manifest in our senses. Science relies mainly on sight. Wisdom relies figuratively on smell, on suggestion and intimation and intuition.

As a closing statement ....

24. One lecture is never enough for influence. What is necessary is many contacts, so that everyone can be both speaker and listener. One can never predict when ideas will take seed in one's thinking. **WHAT THE COLLEGE CAN TEACH IS AN UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT FOR TIME AND TIMING IN SOCIETY - THIS IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF EDUCATION.**

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